

## STARS

ZAHRA SHAHRIAR

It has been exactly twenty days since my sister had left, or as my mummy had put it, flown to the stars. I wonder if anyone had seen her fly up, but I knew that I could tell my friends what an amazing talent my sister possessed. Although I felt quite cross with her for not sharing her ability, I was proud of her nonetheless.

But what really bothered me was why she hadn't returned yet, and why she hadn't said goodbye to me before leaving. No matter where she went, be it her boyfriend's house or the big school she went to, my sister would never leave without planting a kiss on my head or cheek (which I immediately wiped off) and tickling my tummy (which I always returned and saying, "I'll see you soon, buddy.")

Sometimes, I found all that niceness she gave to me quite annoying, because what she never understood is that what a big boy I really am and she should not cuddle up and lift up a five-year old big boy like a baby. I complained to mummy and daddy each time she did, they only smiled and said, "Your sister loves you very much."

Yes she does, but a little too much sometimes. She always called me her very best friend—which I liked, and I often got cross when she called other people and things by pet names. I also got cross when she began spending all her time with the bed; perhaps she would forget all about me now that the bed was her new best friend.

So when she suddenly disappeared to have a trip to the stars, I felt quite relieved that maybe she wouldn't cuddle and tickling me with too much love to a point where it disturbed me, but mummy and daddy were suddenly like stone. They wouldn't talk or move except for the tears slowly streaming down their faces. I felt cross with my sister again; what had she done that made mummy and daddy cry? She can be such a bad girl.

But I began missing her on the fifth day of her trip. Everything started to feel strange; there was no one suddenly picking me up and blowing raspberries on my tummy, there was no one throwing me over their shoulder and taking me to the bookshelves to pick out a story for bed-time, there was no one to hug me tight or call me her best friend. I started to get impatient; why was she gone for so long? Didn't she love me anymore? I wondered if I was the one who hurt her, so at night I stared up at the stars and promised to her that I'd accept all her cuddles, I wouldn't wipe away her kisses, and I wouldn't tickle her back or even fight with her anymore. I would share all my candy and toys—if only she'd come back soon.

I miss her so much.

I miss the way she'd spend hours I front of the mirror fixing her hair. I miss the way she'd smell like 'She' perfume during the day and 'Yardley' powder at night. I miss our little chats lying in bed; we talked about what we'd do when we're grown-ups. I miss the way she'd

always want to be thin but eat lots of food at the same time. I miss my sister.

So on the twentieth day of her adventure, I was walking with mummy before bed-time at night and I asked her when she'd come back. But mummy's eyes were suddenly watery and she said that my sister wouldn't come back, but we'd see her very, very soon.

Mummy said the same thing lots of times, but it isn't true.

Because soon never came.

Why didn't she kiss me one last time before leaving? Did she forget about me? Is she riding on light? Is she one of the stars now? Is she still my best friend? Does my sister still love me? Will I ever see her again?

The next time she leaves me, will she remember to say goodbye?



The writer is a grade nine student at Sunbeams School.

## AFTERWORD



So this is something we haven't had on Fable Factory before: an editorial. SHOUT's recent expansion allowed us the opportunity to add another page to Fable Factory. As has always been the case for Fable Factory, we'll be avoiding a fixed structure but from now on you can expect this sort of editorial thing every week. It is an opportunity for me, the editor of Fable Factory, to have a little chat with you. A chat about what it is I'm publishing this week, and what attracted me to these stories. More importantly I will identify the faults I see in them, so that the writers can use that criticism to, hope-

fully, improve their writing.

Or not, of course. I'm just a magazine editor, I'm no world authority on fiction, and my criticisms may well be off-base. If you feel that I'm saying things that are clearly wrong, contact me on our page or on the SHOUT Discussion Group and we'll have a friendly argument.

On this page we have Stars, which is a submission from a reader. It's nice to be able to publish the very first story someone sends us, and this is a quite good debut. Its problem is quite obvious: it's a familiar plot. Zahra Shahriar does a great job of working within the bounds of what we expect and still bringing us something new and memorable in the way she tells the story. Stars is full of little, intimate details that help sell the fiction and make you invested in the characters, and thus you feel the pain of the narrator's loss. This quality (making a story seem real and relevant through simple details) is evident in the other stories we have this week as well. I'm particularly pleased with The Enchanted Sea, though there isn't much specific to say about it. It's a simple story that just works very well. Lastly, it's nice to be able to publish Anishta's work again. I'm trying to convince her to continue this series. It's difficult to do so since I published the previous Adventure of a 16 Year-

old Girl in January, but hopefully I'll manage it.

We were supposed to publish the winners of the prompt Grades this week. This did not happen because the submissions were not suitable, due to either reasons of quality or length.

Offering a new prompt for the next month.

And to close off this editorial, I asked the SHOUT team to give me a prompt to write on. They gave me: Confederacy of Marsupials.

*They'd spent decades feeling confused and vaguely put upon whenever they needed to choose which stall to enter at a public toilet, which box to tick at a form. Their children would come home with stories like 'Teacher put me in a class with the birds because I told her I came out of an egg.' Matters came to a head when a petition to allow mothers whose children could not leave their pouches accompany them to school was summarily rejected by the government. 'Animalia is a land of equality', President Barn Owl declared. 'We cannot change laws to allow certain groups differential treatment.' But they were different, and they were unrecognized. They formed the United Marsupials' Front and marched onto the streets, fighting through skunk spray and the restraints of the Octopolice, and into history.*

This was a nice chat.

-Zoheb Mashiur, Sub-editor, SHOUT